

ORIENTAL CARPET

View from the "WEST" and view from the "EAST"

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the
ends of the earth!*

“The Ballad of East and West” Joseph Rudyard Kipling

Oriental carpet is a cultural phenomenon with ambivalent perception. The ambivalence of carpet perception is inspired by the distinction of the “Western” (pragmatic) and “Eastern” (contemplative) mental types of viewers. At the same time, common to both mental types is the undisputed recognition of its utilitarian origin and functionality in a traditional society. Now the carpet for all aesthetic object, a luxury item, and of course - the product for sale.

With the invention of weaving technology in the Neolithic era (6-4 millennia BC), all nations have always had a carpet. When and how was the utilitarian “cosmopolitan” carpet divided into “Eastern” and “Western”? It would be naive to believe that the Oriental carpet began to differ from the Western one due to geographic, disunity, through unfamiliar ornamental motifs, colors and design designs. The border between the "West" and "East" in the minds and not in reality. “... There is no East and West” (Rudyard Kipling)

The fundamental differences in the perception of the Oriental carpet are rooted in the political, cultural and mental history of a European who has realized the alienity, remoteness and exoticism of the “East”. The history of awareness of this alienity began with the era when the ancient Greek community first touched and mingled with the Asiatic, and after it, “PaxRomana” decided to expand its political and economic influence in Asia. The division of the world into “West” and “East” began “right here and right now”.

With the establishment of Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages, the geographical, political and economic factors also acquired a religious component. But the Oriental carpet has no religious coloring. So it's not about religion. Then what is the obvious and so stable difference between the “Western” and “Eastern” perception of the carpet. Where are the "roots" of these differences?

Let's try to look at the nature of the perception of "Western" and "Eastern" man "from the inside":

Later, the melting of glaciers in Europe, where the harsh climate and long-term resistance of a person to the geographic and climatic environment remained, formed a pragmatic mental type of European resident. For pragmatics, the hierarchy of values brought from the East of the carpet looks like this: **product - utilitarian item - an item of luxury - an object of art and collectibles.**

Earlier melting of glaciers in the equatorial zone of our planet (Asia), led to an earlier addition of favorable living conditions in these latitudes. It was easier to survive here. Favorable climate, high yield, rich flora and fauna - relaxed Asian inhabitants. Due to weak resistance to nature and the simple adherence to the laws of nature, they constantly had surplus of free time and comfort, which for thousands of years formed the "contemplative" mental type of Asian inhabitant. For this type, the hierarchy of values of the carpet looks in the following sequence: **the utilitarian object bearing the symbols and motives of the tribe (kind) - the subject of pride - the commodity.** Thus, in the first case, the hierarchy of values of the Oriental carpet is headed by its commercial property, in the second - the commercial quality is at the very end of the hierarchical chain. Perhaps this is explained by the fact that the Orient Carpet for the first time reached Europe as a war trophy during the Crusades. Reaching Europe - it turned into a commodity!

The final approval of the commodity status of the Oriental carpet is the result of the functioning of the Great Silk Road and the opening of maritime trade between Europe and Asia. Oriental fabrics and carpets have become a priority product for Spanish and Venetian merchants engaged in maritime trade.

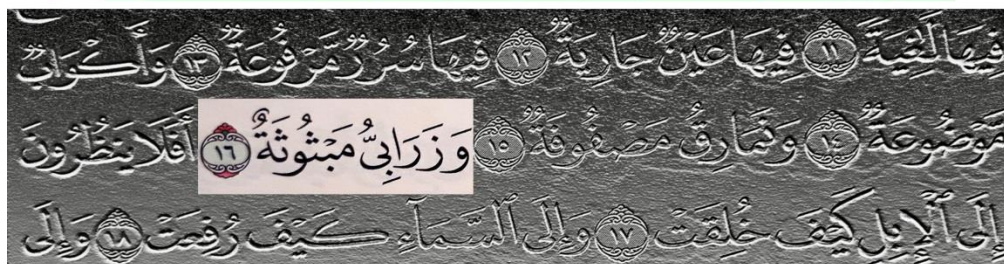
The factor of the "Silk Road" and maritime trade was the "watershed" after which the traditional phenomenon of the Oriental carpet acquired a trivial consumer status in Europe. The carpet, transferred to a new cultural environment, lost its status of an authentic object and relics of the genus, becoming an exotic product with unknown intriguing inner content. The oriental carpet has turned from a carrier of symbols of spiritual memory into an attribute of property status and a trivial decoration of the interior. The spiritual and artistic memory enshrined in the carpet was alien and uninteresting to the new owner of the carpet. Its utilitarian function was also changed.

The indifference of the European "man in the street", a mediocre trader and an expert on Oriental carpets, can be found today. Such indifference of even eminent European carpet experts was met at such a seemingly specific International Symposium on Azerbaijani Carpets (ISAC Baku 2017). The academic program of the Symposium was compiled and conducted under the auspices of experts from the International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC). Scientific presentations on the analysis and interpretation of artistic symbols of spiritual and artistic memory, enshrined in carpets - absolutely not interested in the European members of the ICOC. And they considered themselves experts! Whereas, it was these performances that aroused the extreme interest of the local audience.

These fundamentally different positions of perception of the Oriental Carpet phenomenon persist to this day. For authentic bearers of the traditions of the Oriental carpet, it remains a mystery: “Why do the European experts of the Oriental carpet give preference to the technical indicators of the carpet and do not underestimate the significance of its cultural and symbolic potential? Technical and commercial properties of the carpet are prevailing for them. Apparently, “the conversion of intangible (spiritual, artistic) values into financial ones” requires a deeper and more subtle understanding of the deep hierarchy of values embedded in the Oriental Carpet.

There is no Islamic factor in the hierarchy of values of the Oriental carpet. Islam gave almost nothing to the Oriental carpet. The entire symbolic potential of the Oriental carpet was formed long before Islam. Islam only structured and aestheticized the existing symbolic and ornamental potential in accordance with the new idea of monotheism and theocentrism. The new, structured context of the Oriental carpet under Islam acquires a new semantic paradigm: Sitting on the carpet is a sign of greatness, respect and election by Allah. The traces of this paradigm are fixed in the Quran: In the 16th Ayah 88 of the Surah of the Quran (al-Ghāshiyah [Covering]) described the life of the righteous in the Garden of Paradise. Here the Quran postulates Carpet - as a sign of special respect and God's chosen people of the righteous: "... and carpets spread beneath them":

88. 16 And silken carpets spread. ﴿٨٨﴾ وَزَارِبُ مَبْثُوثَةٍ Wa Zarābīyu Mabthūtha



Thus, the teachings of the Qur'an that spread in the “East” turned a simple utilitarian object into a symbol of pride, greatness and preference. The new symbolic context of the carpet has also acquired a new design idea: “a symbol of the Muslim paradise, limited by a protective decorative border”. The carpet transformed the person sitting on it into an elected and abiding in earthly paradise. Similar semantics of the carpet is fixed in the early images of the Prophet Muhammad sitting on the carpet.

The old tradition of the tribal leader sitting on a carpet spread out in a tent is transferred to the palace culture. Strong Eastern monarchs continued the old tribal tradition of sitting on the carpet, which already served as the throne.

In the development of a utilitarian tribal carpet, a new vector appears - the “palace carpet”, which is already being created by professional craftsmen on the basis of the same tribal traditions.

In the images of this time, the Shah is already seated solely on the carpet symbolizing the Shah's throne. Somewhat later, the flat shape and dimensions of the “carpet-throne” determine the appearance of flat Oriental thrones (*Takht*) covered with

carpet. The new *Takht* was designed to sit on the Asian tradition - on crossed legs. It was a sitting posture on a carpet spread on the tent floor.

Carpet has become a special symbol of significance not only in the palace culture. The impact of the palace carpet on the folk utilitarian carpet led to the enrichment of its status in this society. The most significant events in the life of the "Eastern" person were the Birth-Wedding-Death (Funeral). All these three events are unthinkable in the "East" without the presence of a carpet. The "Oriental" man was born on the carpet, celebrated the wedding against the background of the carpet and dying wrapped in a carpet.

The author of these lines still remembers the statement of his elderly mother, who, buying a carpet, stated: "Death awaits us all. In this case, the house should be a proper carpet. "

A fundamentally different perception of the Oriental Carpet phenomenon is also due to a special mystical attitude towards knotting. For almost all Asian peoples, the process of "tying a knot" has a certain magic tinge. Tying a knot is used in both "white" and "black" magic. Carpet consists of hundreds of thousands of knots. Each node can contain a magic spell. Knowing this, turns the carpet into a matter of reverent respect.

Many ancient Oriental carpets have survived to this day thanks to this special relationship to it. During hardships, devastation, famine, fire, war - the possibility of losing a family mat was perceived as a fatal loss of mystical ancestral ties with ancestors and loss of one's spiritual memory.

With extreme financial difficulties, the carpet in the East was sold last.

EPILOGUE

Returning to the beginning ... to the words of Kipling in The Ballad of East and West, we have to admit that the false "Western-centrist" thinking and its stereotypes have long distorted the meaning of the words of the great writer. In fact, Kipling is not talking about the impossibility of mutual understanding and mutual evaluation of the "East" and the "West." Kipling at the end of the ballad states exactly the opposite.

Returning to the "Oriental Carpet" ...

His perceptions can and should be different. But the universality of the concept of "Good and Evil", which is the inner semantic and value "core" of any Oriental carpet, is inherent in both the "East" and the "West".

The one who stands in front of the carpet needs only an attempt to penetrate into the hidden world of symbolism and artistic fantasies of the Oriental carpet. Anyone who has once penetrated into this world becomes his "prisoner" for the rest of his life. Oriental carpet is a narcotic !!! Be careful !

Felmar

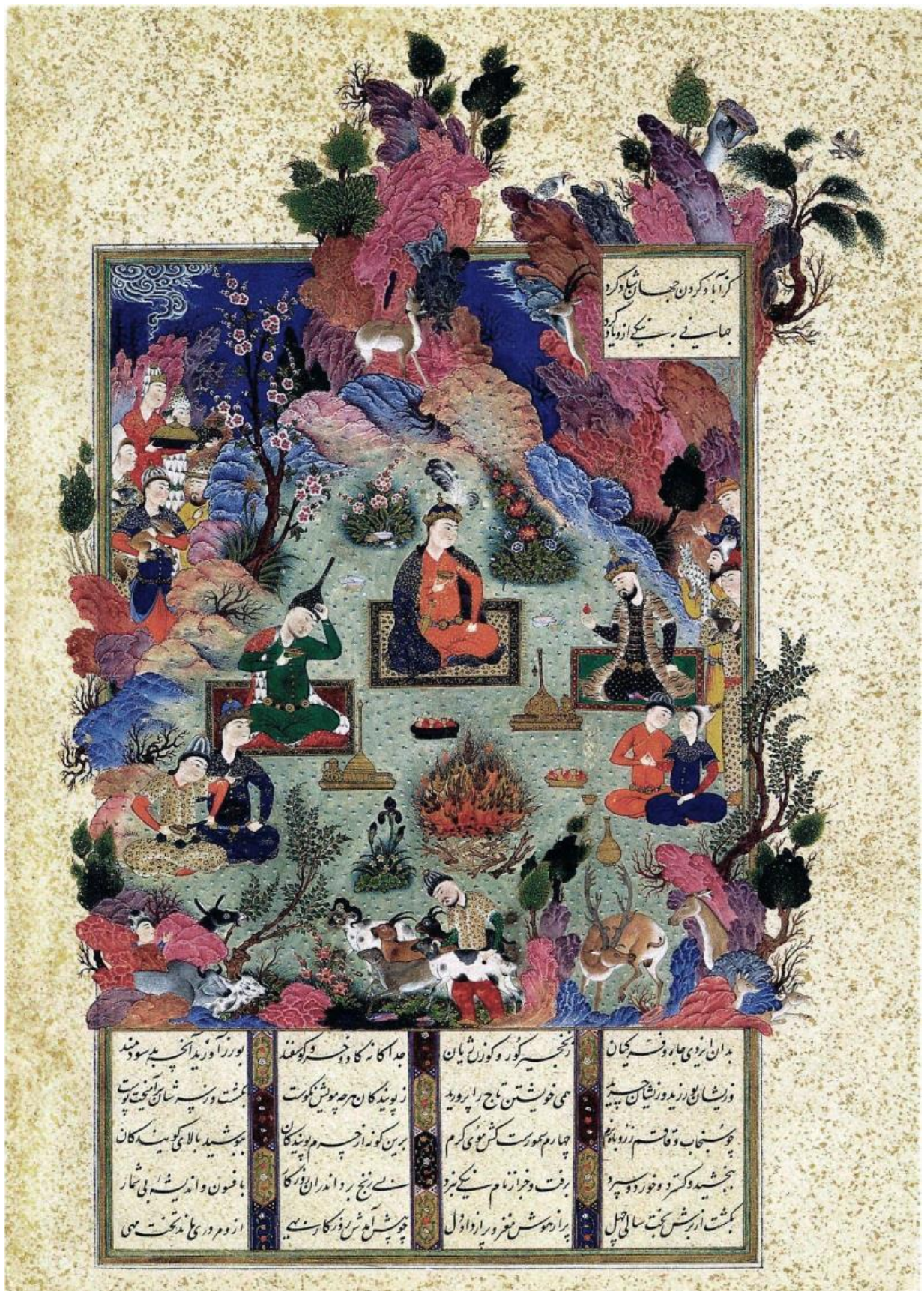
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Presentation of the plan of the sacred Mecca to the Prophet Muhammad. "Mi'raj-nama" (Ascension of Muhammad). Sarai Album (Turkey). Safavid Tabriz, beginning of the 14th century.



Khorasan merchants before the Prophet Muhammad. Detail. "The history of the faithful Imams" al-Viramani. Artist: Kasim Ali. Tabriz. 1525 year. Russian National Library. St. Petersburg



“Shahnama” of Shah Tahmasp. Tabriz. 1520-22. Metropolitan Museum of Art



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Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. 1798. Unknown Artist

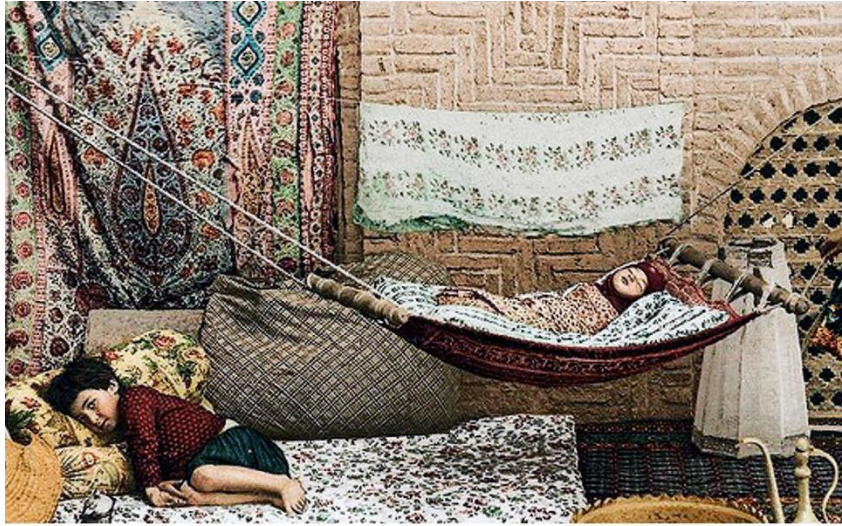


A ceremonial portrait of Abbas Mirza, heir to the Qajar throne.

Artist: Mehr Ali, circa 1787-1802.



Gravestone. The end of the 19th century. Siyazan Region. Azerbaijan.
There is no name, no tribe, no year of death on the gravestone.
There is only an image of her “orphaned” weaver loom



A



B



C

**A : The interior of the house of the Qajar era. 19th century.
Chromophotolithography.**

**B: Preparing a wedding tent. On the wedding carpet with the help of cotton lumps
it says "Be happy." Village Wedding. Azerbaijan. 2016 year.**

**C : Rudolf Nureyev's grave, at a Russian cemetery in Sainte-Geneviève-des-
Bois near Pari. 1993**